



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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SECRETARY WATT COMMENDS DUCKS UNLIMITED FOR ITS NEW PROGRAM TO CONSERVE U.S. WETLANDS

Secretary of the Interior James Watt today praised Ducks Unlimited for its recent commitment to conserve wetland habitat for waterfowl in the United States.

Ducks Unlimited president Robert Eberhardt announced May 6 that the private waterfowl conservation group will for the first time begin efforts to restore and maintain wetland habitat in the United States. The group, which has nearly half a million members, has been responsible for saving millions of acres of wetlands in Canada since 1937.

"There is a critical need for increased efforts by the private sector to preserve our remaining wetlands, and Ducks Unlimited deserves a great deal of credit for its willingness to help," Secretary Watt said. "This is a very important and timely contribution toward wetlands protection."

Watt said that Ducks Unlimited's entry into the United States complements the efforts of the POWDR (Protect Our Wetlands and Duck Resources) task force of business, conservation, and government leaders he established in 1982 to encourage the development of new measures to protect U.S. wetlands. Ducks Unlimited is one of the groups represented on POWDR.

Watt also noted that POWDR had helped develop proposed legislation - the Protect Our Wetlands and Duck Resources Act of 1983 - which would bar use of certain Federal subsidies to encourage development of wetlands.

A recent Interior Department study found that 458,000 acres, or 715 square miles, of wetland habitat is lost in the United States annually and that about half of the 215 million wetland acres that once existed in the United States has disappeared.

"Halting this rapid loss of wetlands is one of our highest environmental priorities," Watt said. "We must conserve these uniquely valuable areas that support our migratory bird populations, contribute to the production of recreational and commercial fisheries, provide natural erosion and flood control, and help to cleanse and replenish our water supply."

Ducks Unlimited will undertake a two-phase program that includes working with Federal and State wildlife agencies to study wetlands to determine areas of high potential productivity for waterfowl, and restoring and maintaining areas in the United States most critical to breeding North American waterfowl.

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